

Letter from Lou Henry Hoover

T'ang Ku, No.2
August 8, 1900

MEMORANDUM

From: Customs Station

Well, Evelyn Wight—you missed one of the opportunities of your life by not coming to China in the summer of 1900. The very fact that the things have happened that have happened make it queer that your guardian star did not get you here in time for it.

So many, many, many times I thought of you, and that you should have been here,—at the most interesting siege and bombardment of the age. The men from Ladysmith—and we have them with us, "Terrible's" guns and all,—say the bombardment there could not compare with ours. The loss of life was greater than either Kimberly or Mafeking. Only it was so short that we did not suffer from hunger,—but neither did we have the chance of honorable, or otherwise, surrender before us in case hunger ever should come. We simply had to stand by our guns until the end with one last bullet left back for each one of ourselves. Our only hope was that the Chinese can't, won't and don't charge,—and they did not—to any alarming extent.

So a good many hundred civilians and a couple of thousand troops sat still and repelled faint hearted charges while 10,000 or 15,000 troops and 20,000 Boxers plunked shells of all sizes into us for exactly one week without a sound or word from this outside reaching us. When the first relief

cut their way into us, 2,000 of them,—enough to get in, but not to do anything more than we could when they got there. And for another two weeks we sat there while the relief came in from the south, at the rate of a thousand a day, more or less, while the Chinese gathered on the north more rapidly, and we gradually got to exchanging shells, instead of receiving them,—and finally, one day came when we sent but did not receive,—and at the same time we, who can, will, and do, charge,—charged. And now the only question is the relief of Peking. For more than a month we have had but two or three unreliable messages from there!

Do you realize it,—that never had so many flags been in action together since our history began. Russian, Japanese, French, German, Austrian, Italian, English, and American! And such a motley array of troops,—artillery, cavalry, infantry, marines, sailors,—Cassocks, Shiites, Siamese, a couple of English Chinese regiments on our side,—a lot of our own darkies, who strike terror to the hearts of some.

But we are still living it—and just now they say, "Kai fan" which means tiffin is ready—and the ink is too bad to come back to it again—Goodbye—for the summer, dear one—I think I will see you soon – But oh, if you had been here!

LOU

*Document: NARA, ARC #187084, From the HH-EWALL
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Ladysmith: British troops who fought in South Africa during the Boer War

"Terrible's": The HMS Terrible traveled from South Africa to China; its large guns were dragged overland to Tientsin to help lift the siege.

Kimberly and Makefing: Battles during the Boer War

Tiffin: Lunch or a light meal; a British term used in British India